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New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 19th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. TEIRLINCK (Belgium)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 113: HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT (continued) (A/C.5/48/37 and Add.1, and A/C.5/48/45; A/49/176 and Add.1, A/49/219 and Add.1, A/49/406, A/49/445, A/49/527 and A/49/587; A/C.5/49/5, A/C.5/49/6 and Corr.1 and Add.1, A/C.5/49/13 and A/C.5/49/14)

1. Mr. OUMMIH (President of the Staff Union) said that, as it prepared for its fiftieth anniversary, the United Nations was undergoing unprecedented change, which could not fail to have a significant effect on the staff. Since a colleague would be addressing the Committee at a later meeting on issues relating to the common system, he would concentrate on the working conditions of the Secretariat staff.

2. No one disputed the essential role that the staff played in the proper functioning of the Organization. It was to be hoped, therefore, that the spirit of cooperation and consultation displayed in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "A strategy for the management of human resources of the Organization" (A/C.5/49/5) would enable the staff and the Administration to resolve issues to the satisfaction of all. He wholeheartedly supported the proposals put forward in the report, particularly those pertaining to training and its application to career development and to accountability for all staff members.

3. One of the most important changes would be the introduction early in 1995 of a new Performance Appraisal System in the Secretariat. The Staff Union had been calling for such a revision for a long time, but considered that the right to rebuttal should be preserved in the future system, as was the case in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It was in favour of a reform of the internal system of justice that would make for an open, fair system that would speed up procedures, but warned against hasty implementation, without consultation, of the steps that would be taken. It also suggested that the Committee should contemplate the possibility of merging the Administrative Tribunal in New York with the Administrative Tribunal of the International Labour Organization, which would result in savings to the Organization and in a unified jurisprudence.

4. The Staff Union obviously welcomed the Secretary-General's strategy of maximum sharing of information and better communication as part of a new management culture, a strategy which had already had a positive effect on staff morale. While delegation of authority in conjunction with genuine accountability could prove effective at the local level, it should not be taken too far because of the inherent dangers. In any event, responsibility for all aspects of personnel policy and for the granting of exceptions should remain with the central management.

5. It was to be hoped that the General Assembly would approve the necessary funds for the training of managers responsible for the new personnel management and accountability systems. Untrained managers had cost the Organization far more than the amounts needed to revitalize management. The Staff Union would

help in any way necessary to effect those changes. Senior officials must be held to equally strict standards of accountability as the rest of the staff, which had not been the case in the past. In that context, the Staff Union recommended that the 1954 Code of Conduct should be revised, as proposed in the report of the Secretary-General on the establishment of a transparent and effective system of accountability and responsibility (A/C.5/49/1), but with staff participation. It was concerned about the double standards used by the Administration, which spoke about monitoring, evaluation and so on when referring to management, but of sanctions and disciplinary measures when referring to the staff. Responsibility and accountability would be fostered not by applying sanctions and disciplinary measures but by improving, among other things, control and reporting, consultation with staff representatives and dissemination of information and rules.

6. The situation of staff in the General Service and related categories was a veritable time bomb. Their salaries had been frozen since 1989 and the career development plan approved in 1986 had still not been implemented, with the result that hundreds of staff members were blocked at the top of their level with no possibility of promotion. A few years previously, there had been a proposal to grant personal promotions to staff at the G-5 and G-4 levels who had been at the top of their level for over 10 years, subject to sufficiently long service and satisfactory performance, but that proposal, as well as the proposal for the addition of another longevity step, was still pending. The placement and promotion system introduced in 1993 also needed reviewing to make it fairer and more transparent.

7. Opportunities for the promotion of staff in the General Service and related categories to the Professional category were 50 per cent less than in 1979; the ratio of available P-1 and P-2 posts (70 per cent for external candidates as against 30 per cent for internal candidates) was discriminatory and contravened staff regulation 4.4 on recruitment. Staff members in other categories were not subject to any quota when applying for posts at a higher level. The Staff Union wholeheartedly supported the proposal by the Office of Human Resources Management that it should initiate a triennial review of the career situation of staff members who had not been promoted under the current system, as well as the request for an increase in the proportion of P-2 posts available for the promotion of staff in the General Service and related categories from 30 to 40 per cent. Notwithstanding those measures, however, the overall need to maintain two distinct categories of staff members should be reviewed and consideration should be given to the establishment of a single category of international civil servants.

8. With regard to the salary survey being conducted by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC), the Staff Union had requested, through the Coordinating Committee for Independent Staff Unions and Associations (CCISUA), a review of the methodology employed, in the light of the negative results of the surveys conducted in Paris and Montreal. Should ICSC fail to respond positively to that request, the Staff Union might be compelled not only to withdraw from participation in the current salary survey, as the staff in Geneva and Rome had already done, but also to suspend its participation in the Commission's work.

The staff in the General Service and related categories, who formed the backbone of the Secretariat, deserved better working conditions, increased recognition and genuine career opportunities. The Organization must set an example in that regard.

9. While he was gratified to note that relations between the Administration and the staff had improved in the previous six months, he could not say the same about the security and safety of staff on mission. In the past two years, 86 civilian staff members had been murdered and yet no one had been brought to justice. Referring to the draft convention on the safety of United Nations and associated personnel currently before the Sixth Committee, he reiterated the request he had made to the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) that the draft convention should cover all personnel, civilian and military, working directly or indirectly for the United Nations, not only with peace-keeping operations but also with humanitarian missions and electoral assistance and other operations.

10. He regretted that calls for the appointment of staff counsellors in mission areas with more than 1,000 staff had not been heeded. Moreover, the hiring of international contractual personnel in the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) who performed the same job but received different pay because they came from different countries or were part of different teams led to discrimination which should be ended urgently.

11. Referring to the recent administrative instruction on the reporting of inappropriate use of United Nations resources, he believed that there were better ways of improving the functioning of the Organization, such as strengthening the Staff Incentive Programme and helping to monitor the implementation of winning proposals, which were the measures proposed by the Joint Inspection Unit in document A/48/420. The Staff Union supported the Secretary-General's strategies for improving the status of women in the Secretariat. It was unacceptable that, despite years of discussion about improving the status of women, in the Secretariat itself so many qualified women should be blocked at the G-5 and P-5 levels for 10 years and more.

12. In conclusion, he was confident that the spirit of cooperation which inspired both staff and the Administration would permit the Organization to effectively achieve its goals.

AGENDA ITEM 112: SCALE OF ASSESSMENTS FOR THE APPORTIONMENT OF THE EXPENSES OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued) (A/C.5/49/31); A/C.5/49/L.4/Rev.1)

13. Mr. MAYCOCK (Barbados), introducing draft resolution A/C.5/49/L.4/Rev.1 concerning the establishment of an ad hoc working group to study the implementation of the principle of capacity to pay as the fundamental criterion in determining the scale of assessments, said that the Spanish-speaking delegations had pointed out that paragraph 5 of the Spanish text of the draft resolution was not consistent with the English text and that they would communicate to the Secretariat the wording that should be used. He recalled that the consultations on the establishment of the working group, which took

place within the framework of efforts aimed at making the method of determining the scale of assessments more stable, simpler and more transparent, had been taking place since the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly. For various reasons, they had failed until now to yield a consensus.

14. Under the terms of the draft resolution, the General Assembly would establish an ad hoc intergovernmental working group of experts to study all aspects of the implementation of the principle of capacity to pay. The composition of the working group of experts had been discussed at length during informal consultations and it had finally been decided that the President of the General Assembly would be entrusted with the task of appointing the experts, in consultation with Member States. The working group of experts would be required to submit a report on its work to the Committee on Contributions no later than 15 May 1995, in order to permit the Committee on Contributions to consider it at its June session and to take it into consideration in its deliberations as mandated by section C, paragraph 1, of General Assembly resolution 48/223. Member States were invited to cooperate with the working group of experts by providing it with necessary documents and expert services. On the question of financing - a matter which had also been discussed at length during the consultations - the draft resolution provided that the activities of the working group should be funded within existing financial resources, although Member States were encouraged to make voluntary contributions, especially those States whose experts would be appointed to the working group.

15. The draft resolution proposed was the fruit of long and arduous negotiations and the common view was that it would therefore be preferable for the text to be adopted without a vote and for delegations to keep their comments to a minimum.

16. Mrs. RODRIGUEZ (Cuba) requested that the Spanish version of the draft resolution should be brought into line with the English text.

17. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Fifth Committee wished to adopt draft resolution A/C.5/49/L.4/Rev.1 without a vote.

18. Draft resolution A/C.5/49/L.4/Rev.1 was adopted.

19. Mrs. RODRIGUEZ (Cuba) said that the adoption of the draft resolution without a vote had been made possible thanks to the flexibility and spirit of cooperation which all delegations had displayed. The Cuban delegation, for its part, had had serious reservations about paragraph 5 of the draft resolution, since it believed that the modalities of the funding of the working group of experts should have been the same as those provided for other similar working groups such as, for example, the working group established by the General Assembly in section III, paragraph 2, of its resolution 48/218. The Cuban delegation had joined the consensus on the understanding that the payment of contributions should not be mandatory for Member States and that the funding modalities set out in paragraph 5 would in no way constitute a precedent. The principle of equality among Member States meant that, whatever their financial

resources, they should all have the possibility of participating in the various ad hoc bodies or working groups which were established. Her delegation reserved the right to refrain from joining in any future consensus on a draft resolution which provided for similar modalities of financing.

20. Mr. KUMAMARU (Japan) expressed the hope that the adoption of the draft resolution would result in a constructive study. For that, it would be necessary for the General Assembly to rapidly appoint the members of the working group of experts to enable them to begin their work without delay, given the short time available to them to complete their task. Provision should also be made for a preparatory phase which would permit the experts to familiarize themselves with the different aspects of the question, so that they would be able to devote most of their work to the discussion of substantive questions.

21. Mr. ALOM (Bangladesh), endorsing the comments made by the representative of Cuba, said that any provision which would tend to limit the participation of Member States in working groups on the basis of financial or other criteria was inopportune. In that regard, the formulation used at the end of paragraph 5 should not constitute a precedent, since its effect could be to exclude certain Member States which might otherwise contribute to the work of the group of experts but lacked the necessary financial resources.

22. Mr. YAMAK (Turkey) said that many questions remained with regard to the classification of countries for the purpose of establishing the scale of assessments. He hoped that the working group of experts would also consider that question, in cooperation with the Bretton Woods institutions.

23. The CHAIRMAN said that, with regard to document A/C.5/49/31, which contained a statement of the financial implications of the draft resolution, the Committee would await the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions before considering and taking a decision on it. The Committee had thus concluded that part of its consideration of agenda item 112 and he requested the Rapporteur to report directly thereon to the General Assembly.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.